

# **Investigating the Impact of Teacher Socialization on a Physical Education Teacher Candidate during the Student Teaching Process**

**By Glenn Hushman**

## **Introduction**

Socialization is the process of gathering knowledge and constructing it in a social context. This gathering of knowledge is often acquired formally through an educational process or informally by interaction with other people (Capel, 2007). A physical education teacher goes through a socialization process where beliefs, attitudes, behaviors, and teaching philosophies are influenced.

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Wright, McNeil, and Butler (2004) suggest that when an individual enters the field of physical education, they go through distinct phases of socialization. There are three phases identified: recruitment, professional socialization, and occupational socialization. The experiences the individual has when they are growing up are what make up the recruitment phase. The professional socialization phase includes experiences the individual has when entering, going through, and exiting the training process of teacher education. Occupational socialization, the final stage of the socialization process, is comprised of the ex-

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periences the teacher has when they are awarded a job and begin working as an independent physical education teacher in a school setting.

#### **Recruitment Phase**

The recruitment phase of socialization begins when an individual enters the first years of education (Hutchinson, 1993; Lortie, 1975). During this 12-to-15 year period, essential life skills are being developed such as common sense and learning how to socialize with peers and instructors. This time in education offers the individual the opportunity to develop beliefs about education by experiencing them first hand. The successes and failures endured during this time in the educational system will effect what each student will ultimately choose to do with their lives. For those who decide to pursue a degree in higher education in order to become educators, this time will lay the foundation of how the individual defines a quality educational experience.

#### **Professional Socialization**

Professional socialization occurs during the time that a pre-service teacher spends in an undergraduate teacher education program. Experiences in teacher education programs include course study, early fieldwork and student teaching, all of which have a large influence on perceptions of students in physical education programs (Lawson, 1986; Wright, McNeill, & Butler, 2004). A common goal of pre-service teacher education programs is to encourage each student to develop beliefs and understand the basic culture of the subject, which often challenges preconceived notions when entering the undergraduate program (Lawson, 1986).

A component of physical education teacher education programs (PETE) are field experiences where teacher candidates are allowed to incorporate skills, techniques, and theories into actual teaching environments. Incorporation of material and ideas learned during the pre-service educational process into a real educational setting is dictated by factors such as how the knowledge was delivered by teachers at the undergraduate level, the impression and experience obtained while student teaching, and how much or how little the cooperating teacher helped and influenced the student during the student teaching process (Graber, 1995).

Student teaching should be considered the culminating experience for those leaving a pre-service teacher education program in most areas. Many students claim they learn to teach on a more realistic level during their student teaching experience. However, studies show that many of these student teachers fail to understand how experience during their pre-service teacher education program connects to actual teaching and instruction in a school setting. These students also tend to mimic the practices and activities of the cooperating teacher without recognizing that these practices and routines must be continuously reconstructed within the framework of the classroom context and purposes (Colton & Sparks-Langer, 1993). Studies

conducted by McIntyre, Byrd, and Foxx (1996) concluded that cooperating teachers help and influence student teachers the most, because they work closely together on a daily basis.

### **Occupational Socialization**

Occupational experiences are the final stage of socialization when the student officially is awarded the title of physical educator and steps into the first year of full time, independent teaching. Solomon, Worthy, and Carter (1993) suggest that occupational socialization carries with it four main issues: marginalization of their subject (whereby physical education is regarded as less important than other academic subjects), role conflict (when teachers realize they have many roles to fulfill other than that of teacher), reality shock (when they realize that they are not in optimal teaching setting with incredibly motivated students), and wash-out effect (when novices discard what they learned at the university and revert to teaching in a way they themselves were taught).

### **Socialization during the Student Teaching Process**

The relationship between professional socialization and occupational socialization is bridged solely by the student teaching practicum. During the student teaching experience, the teacher candidate continues to function in a PETE program as a student while also taking on responsibilities reflective of a full time teacher. A good question to pose is whether or not pre-service teacher education programs are preparing students to transition from learning to teaching. Since student teaching is the first transition to a real classroom setting, this experience offers a viable opportunity to study if students are prepared to teach or not.

The research analyzed here agrees that teacher socialization does in fact occur and affects the teachers of the future both positively and negatively. Although many specific areas have been studied regarding teacher socialization many, such as the student teaching experience, are in need of additional research to bolster the base of literature. This study was guided by the following question: Does the cooperating teacher negatively or positively affect the socialization process of a pre-service physical education teacher during the student teaching process?

### **Subject and Context**

The participant in this study was a Caucasian female named Cari (a pseudonym to protect her privacy). Cari grew up in what she referred to as "White suburbia." The schools she attended from kindergarten through high school resided in upper class areas and were comprised of predominantly Caucasian students from very educated families. Her father worked for a car dealership and her mother stayed home with her while she grew up. Cari was an only child growing up until around

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the age of 12 or 13 when her younger brother was born. Dance and cheerleading was her primary involvement in physical activity while growing up and was the only real competitive sports in which she was involved. She had positive experiences in the realm of swimming but was never chose to get serious about the sport. Regarding physical education, Cari admits she doesn't recall it being her favorite class.

When I was younger, like in elementary school and middle school, I played softball and basketball then decided to stop at the middle school level because I felt like I started too late so developmentally I could not advance anymore.

When asked why she decided to become a physical education teacher, Cari responded:

I had awesome teachers in high school. I think that's when I started getting into health and fitness . . . what I remember the most in high school was that we were required to take a swimming course and I went into the class thinking I would be the lowest level and actually ended up being in the highest level group. My teacher asked me to come back the next semester and student teach so I think that has a lot to do with why I went into the major (of physical education).

The PETE program in which the participant was enrolled was at a university located in the central region of the United States. The mission of the PETE program was to prepare professionals capable of delivering programs that promote self-directed, responsible, physically active lifestyles in school-aged children and youth across the state and region. Coursework included classes on assessment, curricular models, teaching styles, and theory as related to physical education. The goal of the PETE program was to graduate entry-level professional physical educators who possess a personal and professional physical commitment to physical activity and will demonstrate the knowledge and skills required to promoting learning in the area of physical activity.

### **Methodology**

Qualitative inquiry was the utilized research platform for this study because of the exploratory nature of this subject. The data collection sources utilized in this study were interviews, documentation, observation, and physical artifacts. Categorical aggregation (Stake, 1995) was used to analyze the data, resulting in a collection of different instances from various data sources that resulted in the formation of general themes in the research.

Observations of teaching lessons of different content occurred over an eight-week period. During these observations, field notes were taken and recorded regarding different aspects of teaching including lesson structure, curriculum model, management techniques, instruction, and feedback. Furthermore, opportunities were taken to speak informally to the cooperating teacher and other students.

Formal interviews were conducted with cooperating teachers and student

teachers from both placements. Each interview was conducted the same way asking pre-written questions with responses recorded with a hand held recording device. Formal interviews occurred with participants two times per week during the eight-week study. Initial interviews were intended to offer a small biography of each of the participants to help understand more clearly past experiences that may have influenced teaching practices. Remaining interviews were administered with intent to get a clear picture if there was a socialization process during student teaching and if this process had no effect, a negative effect or a positive effect on the student teacher candidate.

Documents such as course syllabi, evaluations from university supervisors and cooperating teachers, written examinations and assignments, and unit and lesson plans were examined from participants. These were reviewed in order to better understand the educational background of the student teacher and cooperating teacher.

Triangulation and peer debriefing were used to establish trustworthiness in this study (Glesne, 1999). Documents such as course syllabi, evaluations from university supervisors and cooperating teachers, written examinations and assignments, and unit and lesson plans from the student teacher were cross analyzed with interview feedback from both the student teacher and cooperating teacher to determine in what areas triangulation of data could be established.

## **Results**

Seven themes were identified from analysis of Cari's journal entries, interviews, and observations. They can be best conceptualized in two major categories with several sub-themes. The first category includes instances of Cari's experiences with delivering and witnessing effective and ineffective teaching practices. The sub-themes include an understanding of quality teaching practices and the confirmation of effective and ineffective teaching practices. The second category includes incidents of Cari struggling to teach effectively due to environmental and political challenges. The sub-themes include pressure to deliver ineffective practices, the inability to find small success and a resulting wash-out to ineffective practices.

## **Themes**

### ***Effective vs. Ineffective Teaching***

*Understands difference between effective and ineffective teaching.* One of the many goals of the program at the university Cari attended was to prepare each physical educator to understand and be able to implement activities to meet all the needs of the majority of students that participate in physical education. Cari was immersed in two very different programs while student teaching. The first placement offered her the opportunity to witness and be an intricate part of an effective physical education program. Her second setting offered the same opportunities as

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the first but was identified as an ineffective program. The first theme that emerged in this study illustrated that Cari was aware of the difference between effective teaching and ineffective teaching.

During her university experience, Cari was taught what effective and ineffective physical education might look like. It was mainly theoretical until her first student teaching placement where she witnessed what a real effective physical education program resembles.

At elementary it was not necessarily advice but just a role model . . . like different things I need to pay attention to such as students that have emotional disorders or something because of family situations . . . we talked about diverse learners (in university) and I never realized that would be something I would have to consider so just watching her and her interactions with everyone was the best thing she did for me. (Cari, Interview 2)

*Confirmation that effective teaching exists.* The interaction between Cari and her cooperating teacher at the elementary school supported what her university's beliefs were about teaching diverse populations and thus affirmed to Cari what she learned about diverse learners was truly practiced in a real physical education setting.

Another question directed to Cari that asked whether or not she felt her cooperating teacher was "effective" or "ineffective" supported some of the ideas the university offered Cari during her pre-service physical education program regarding effective and ineffective programs.

At my first placement there was definitely effective teaching. Everything that I have learned that should be effective, such as teaching skills and applying them to games, and teaching cognitive and affective things along with those skills, she did all of that and made it relevant to kids. I could really see progress with those kids because of how she trained them to learn in PE. I went into her classroom teaching exactly the way she does and the exact same way that I learned at the university.

Cari again confirms that what she learned at the university level about tactics of teaching was in fact behavior that occurs within a real physical education setting. The pre-service teacher education program offers teaching models and tactics that are the base for effective teaching. Seeing these models and tactics being used and actually working in a real physical education setting justifies to Cari what her university experience has taught her truly is what effective teaching should be modeled after.

Her answer to another question that inquired about if the cooperating teacher demonstrated teaching strategies that matched what Cari was taught at the university as "effective" strategies also suggested that her experience with elementary student teaching was what a physical education class should resemble.

I did have a perfect cooperating teacher at the elementary school in that she goes to conferences, she holds a high position within CAHPERD so knows that those conferences are important and she does research and stuff . . . At the high school

level, honestly, like I said there is no teaching style going on except for the fact that she works out with them (the students).

The theory Cari was offered regarding effective physical education during her pre-service teacher education program is once again supported as models, activities and teacher behavior are used within a physical education class offered in a real public school setting.

*Ineffective teaching is witnessed.* During her second placement, she witnessed a completely different style of teaching in a completely different school setting. Cari was immersed in a program that was traditional in nature and was directed by a cooperating teacher that displayed flawed management and teaching techniques. This combined with the lack of any kind of curriculum lead Cari to distinguish it as an ineffective physical education program.

High school teaching is hard because from what I've seen the kids for the most part does what she asks, um, but there's not much supervision because she works out with them and so when I was observing the first week I would stand on the side and watch kids not do things, lift in correctly, things like that and she didn't notice cause she was off doing her own workout.

Cari's pre-service teacher education program emphasizes that teachers should instruct from the perimeter of all activities so that problems with form, technique, behavior and equipment can be monitored for all students. Knowing this and witnessing such perimeter teaching being completed successfully at her previous student teaching placement, Cari feels that the cooperating teacher at her new placement demonstrates traits of an ineffective teacher.

During another lesson, Cari notes:

There's a lot of inactivity in her classes and a lot of inappropriate competition in her classes so I don't see kids that are the lowest getting any higher. Possibly the highest skilled kids are being challenged a little bit but not really. There's a lot of dodge ball and kickball and things like that so there's absolutely no skills whatsoever in the last five weeks I have not seen a single skill being taught whatsoever. She pulls out the balls and sticks and nets and says 'there you go.'

Another intricate piece of Cari's undergraduate education was the emphasis that physical education does not have to be based on competition. The program at Cari's university stresses teaching models that have some competition, but still emphasize teamwork and social responsibility in order to meet the needs of all students, not just those encouraged by competition. Furthermore, Cari's pre-service teacher education program was adamant that games like kickball and dodge ball were ineffective teaching activities as they promote little activity for large groups, degradation, and spot lighting, which have been deemed negative traits within physical education.

The two different placements allowed Cari to witness dramatically different

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styles of teaching. During her elementary placement, Cari was immersed in a program that supported the theories, models and techniques that were offered to her during her pre-service teacher education program. She was able to witness what she was taught during her undergraduate program was truly an effective way to teach physical education.

During her secondary placement, Cari was witness to a program that offered a traditional physical education setting. Kickball and dodge ball were played, the teacher was unaware of behavioral problems and students that struggled with skill and proper technique. This display of teaching compared to her experience at her previous placement and what she learned at the university lead Cari to conclude that the teaching at the secondary placement was definitely a display of ineffective physical education.

#### ***The Struggle to Teach Effectively***

*Pressure from faculty to use ineffective teaching practices.* Cari went into student teaching with a belief about what effective teaching should resemble. She understood teaching quality physical education required that the teaching models consist of teaching skills, encourage physical activity, promote teamwork, and develop social skills vital to success as an adult. She entered her first student teaching placement and saw first hand that a physical education program could meet such goals. She was then able to practice such skills in order to become a more proficient teacher herself.

When she entered her second placement, she was witness to a program that she knew was not effective or appropriate for a physical education environment. Although she knew how to implement a quality physical education program, she felt pressured from her cooperating teacher and other staff members to teach the same way they did.

I asked a couple of the high school teachers at my school how they felt about teaching skills like the Tactical Approach doing skills and practice in games. They all were pretty much at the consensus that high school students didn't need skills at all and so they just said that the Tactical Approach doesn't work and they don't do it. I disagree with them because I have seen it work.

When spoken to in an informal setting, Cari admitted that she just wanted to "jump through the hoops in order to graduate" and that she did not feel comfortable "ticking anybody off just because I want to do what's right for physical education." Cari was nervous that if she implemented a model she learned during her pre-service teacher education program she might not get a passing grade from her cooperating teacher so she instead followed the same lesson format that her teacher had implemented.

It was noted during observations of her teaching that she was instructing activities and lessons in a format other than what her university experience would have defined as a quality instructional model.



*Unable to find small successes.* Due to an educational atmosphere that was not conducive to implement one of the curricular models or instructional techniques learned during her pre-service teacher education program, Cari was unable to find success during her second placement. Cari noted that her university experience did not necessarily hinder her from being successful at the secondary level, but did not offer her enough options to come to a middle ground between what her cooperating teacher believed was good versus what Cari felt was quality physical education.

The only thing we really learned (during the university experience) was Tactical Approach and the Sport Education Model and that does nothing for me especially because at the high school she (the cooperating teacher) doesn't do units. Like I said its like, baseball one day and basketball the next and there's no progression.

Informally, Cari noted she felt if she had a more rounded experience during her pre-service teacher education instead of one focused solely on two models, she might have been able to implement some solutions to the "terrible educational experience my cooperating teacher offered her physical education class."

Cari constantly came back to the fact that she had no guidance or help from her secondary cooperating teacher. During her high school placement, she felt she "got absolutely no feedback whatsoever and it has been a terrible situation." When asked whether Cari felt she had guidance with management techniques that her cooperating teacher used, Cari responded:

In high school, I don't feel like we had any direction. I feel like most my knowledge on management in high school comes from a job that I had over the summer at a summer camp with high school kids . . .

*Wash-out to techniques learned during recruitment phase.* Cari's struggles at the secondary level led her to resort to falling back on experiences other than her undergraduate program for help. Her pre-service education programs main focus was on two specific models that require planning and experience. Without support from her cooperating teacher, who did not help Cari plan or offer an educational environment in which to try some of the models and techniques she learned during her university experience, Cari was forced to teach in a manner she knew was not effective. Furthermore, Cari did not feel comfortable attempting to implement a program she learned during her pre-service teacher education program because her cooperating teacher and staff told her they would not work. Feeling pressure that her grade could be affected negatively if she did not follow the same teaching style her cooperating teacher did, Cari fell silent and "jumped through hoops in order to graduate" even though she understood the way she was teaching was ineffective.

Pressure from her cooperating teacher and other physical education faculty members at her student teaching placement pushed Cari to teach with techniques and models that she knew were not effective. Feeling like she had no other options because of her inability to implement curricular or instructional techniques

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learned during her undergraduate program, Cari fell back to using techniques that she adopted during the recruitment phase of socialization.

### **Discussion**

It is the cooperating teacher that will ultimately offer a sense of what works and what does not in a real physical education setting to the student teacher. Experience is often more powerful than theory and because of this phenomenon, the student teacher entering teaching with a cooperating teacher may be swayed to believe what the cooperating teacher says even if it differs from the undergraduate program because the student teacher can see what works and what doesn't in a real educational setting. Cari displayed an understanding of what effective teaching should look like based on what she learned during her experience in the pre-service teacher education program at her university. As she entered student teaching, she knew what effective teaching should be only on a theoretical level. After having an extremely positive student teaching experience during her first placement, Cari witnessed in a real educational setting what she learned during her pre-service teacher education program was in fact quality physical education.

During her second student teaching placement, Cari was immersed in a program that follows a traditional teaching style. Although Cari knew from her undergraduate experience that this type of physical education offered little success for the student and teacher, the cooperating teacher's educational environment was not conducive to the models that Cari learned how to use during her undergraduate experience. Furthermore, Cari felt pressured to teach the same way as her cooperating teacher in fear of not receiving a passing grade from her cooperating teacher.

Her first placement offered so much reassurance about what effective teaching resembled that even an extremely difficult second student teaching placement, which pressured her into teaching an ineffective program, did not seem to change her beliefs about what makes an effective program. Cari was given the skills through her university experience to offer new, cutting edge physical education to future educational systems. Her education was so strong that she was able to differentiate between effective and ineffective physical education as a new teacher candidate.

Thus, it can be suggested that both positive and negative socialization do occur during the student teaching process. In this particular study, the positive socialization slightly outweighs the negative socialization. It may keep positive socialization on top if teacher education programs being to help teacher candidates entering the student teaching process realize that although they may not be able to change a curriculum completely, they still have the tools to teach effectively.

Additionally, teacher education programs, although sometimes difficult, must continue to seek strong student teaching placements that are congruent with the programs philosophy in order to foster positive socialization as much as possible.

## Implications

### ***For Teacher Education Programs***

One of the major problems Cari encountered during her secondary experience was that her in-depth knowledge about effective models of physical education was limited. Although the university program strives to teach as many models as possible, it only has time to focus in on a few. The models that Cari came into student teaching prepared to teach required a large amount of planning time and a specific structure that Cari's cooperating teacher did not offer. It would be useful to teach other models or techniques that are on a smaller scale and act more like pieces of a puzzle that can fit in any educational setting. Furthermore, emphasis could be placed on instructional techniques as well as curricular models. If Cari were prepared with smaller instructional techniques, she may have been able to achieve small successes which would outweigh the zero success that she felt when exiting the second student teaching experience.

### ***For Preparation for Social Difficulties***

Another negative aspect that Cari encountered was a social dynamic for which she had not been prepared. When asking her cooperating teacher and other members of the physical education faculty about implementing one of the models that she learned during her university experience, she received no support and was told that such models do not work in a real educational setting. Furthermore, she was pressured into teaching a style of physical education that she knew was not effective. This peer pressure to do something different than one learned is noted by Templin (1989) in Chapter 1 to exist during the occupational phase of socialization. That this lack of support occurred during Cari's student teaching experience suggests that peer pressure from other members of faculty and staff may begin at the student teaching process. In the future, pre-service teacher education programs may want to place some focus on how to handle such social difficulties with remedies or ideas that will help the student teacher educate in a fashion they are comfortable without feeling like they may fail the student teaching portion of their education if they try to change the curriculum already implemented by the cooperating teacher.

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